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Objectives

→ Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide participants with strategies that will enable them to write measurable improvement objectives aligned with SPP indicators and can be continuously evaluated and monitored.

→ Outcomes

- Participants will learn to write improvement objectives which are specific and measurable.
- Participants will understand how to relate objectives to SPP Indicators.
- Participants will learn to develop quantifiable benchmarks and targets.
- Participants will learn the components of an effective evaluation and progress monitoring.

Understanding Objectives

Specific and Measurable Objectives

Scoring Guide- Objectives

- ✓ Objective is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results Oriented and Time-bound (SMART goal).
- ✓ Intermediate and final targets are specified and dates by which they will be achieved are specified.
- ✓ The SPP Indicators that the objective will address are specified.
- ✓ Evaluation procedures align directly to the objective.
- ✓ It is clearly stated when reports with respect to outcomes will be made and to whom.
- ✓ Evaluation procedures occur with sufficient frequency

The term “measurable” objective is frequently used synonymously as “quantifiable” objective because numbers (e.g., counts, average, or percentages) are used to demonstrate whether a certain criterion has been met. The Improvement Planning scoring guide requires that all objectives be written as “SMART” goals, or that they be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results Oriented, and Time-Bound. For example, after identifying “graduation rates” as an area in need of improvement, a District team may develop an objective that states “By the end of the 2007 academic year, our district will increase graduation

rates for students with disabilities by 10%.” The objective does not indicate how this will happen, it merely states in a specific and measurable way, what will occur once improvement strategies have been implemented. In most cases, District teams will want to align the objectives to meet the targets the State has set in its SPP. However, the targets also need to be achievable, yet challenging.

With regard to “specific,” the District needs to clearly define exactly what improvement need will be addressed and answer the question – what will be achieved? As explained earlier, to make sure the objectives are measurable, measurable means that others can clearly see that the District has—or has not—accomplished the objective.

Setting Relevant, But Challenging Objectives

Objectives set by District teams can be directly written based on the SPP indicators, although this is not required. The objectives should be realistic, but also provide a challenge to District teams – ambitious, but manageable. Objectives should not simply be a “wish list” of what should be accomplished under ideal circumstances. As such, the District needs to understand the importance of keeping objectives reasonable. All too often, a group of stakeholders may become overly ambitious in their objective setting, suggesting perhaps “There should only be a 100% target for graduation of students with disabilities”. While that is something everyone would like to see, it’s simply not realistic for most districts. Setting unrealistic objectives only sets up failure and lacks credibility.

Basic Rules for Developing Objectives

1. Objectives should be realistic—Set intermediate and final targets that the team knows can be reached. The objective must be based on improvement activities that can actually take place. Objectives should be ambitious, but manageable. Always look at your capacity to manage the activities associated with the improvement objective. Try to find the right “balance” to setting objectives that are both challenging, but achievable. Being achievable suggests that whatever objective is set, team members and stakeholders agree that it can be achieved. For example, setting a 100% graduation target may simply be too high for most districts.

2. Objectives should be time-bound – The objective must have some time-related element to it. There must be some type of “end point”, or a specific date by which the final target will be achieved, indicated so that the team can evaluate whether the objective has been achieved.
3. Objectives should be relevant to the Stakeholder Group—Stakeholders are the District’s strongest allies in terms of gathering support for improvement efforts. Make sure the team works with stakeholders to help them understand the implications of target setting and the development of objectives.
4. Objectives should be relevant to Missouri State improvement goals—Determine objectives and set targets by looking at local baseline performance in relation to annual State targets on the SPP.
5. Objectives should be relevant to the prioritized needs from the Needs Assessment.

Developing Intermediate and Final Targets

An important step when developing objectives is to use baseline data, which is a “line in the sand” that can be used to measure change in performance on an objective. This is where the district is relative to the objective. The baseline data will guide the Stakeholder Group to determine appropriate targets. For example, if the district has a baseline of 53% graduation rate and they set their target at 82% by the year 2010, the target is 82%. The difference between the baseline (53%) and the target (82%) could be divided into increments that represent yearly intermediate targets. However, it may be more appropriate to have smaller expectations of increase during the first year or two of the implementation of any new strategy to improve student outcomes. Most of the difference may come after the strategy is well established. The difference between the baseline and the target should guide the district in determining what the scheduled intermediate target should be. All targets should be quantifiable.

Relating Objectives to Indicators

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires States to address various types of performance indicators based on priorities established by the U.S. Secretary

of Education. Every State is required to report on the performance of each of its Locals Education Agencies (LEAs) with regard to the following indicators : (1) Graduation, (2) Dropout, (3) Assessment, (4) Discipline, (5) Placements, (6) ECSE Educational Environments, (7) Early Childhood Outcomes, (8) Parent Involvement, (9 & 10) Disproportionality, (11) Evaluation Timelines, (12) Part C to Part B Transition, (13) Transition Plans, and (14) Postsecondary Outcomes. Objectives can be “linked” with various indicators. To ensure fidelity with State SPP indicators, it is necessary to relate each objective with its relevant indicator(s). For example, if the district team decides to address dropout prevention, the related objective would clearly be SPP indicator 2—Dropout. However, establishing other types of relationships may be less clear. For example, instituting an objective involving school-wide behavioral supports may have an impact on more than one area. For example, such indicators as 4—Discipline, 5—Placements, and 9 and 10—Disproportionality may also be impacted. The team will need to decide which indicators will likely be impacted.

Thinking About Evaluation

Monitoring Objectives

District teams need to monitor their progress in meeting improvement objectives identified as part of the needs assessment process. Periodic reviews are necessary, but the frequency of the review – weekly, monthly, or quarterly or yearly – depend upon the objective(s) selected. For example, new data on graduation rates are available only once a year and therefore this objective would be reviewed at that time. However, data for other objectives may be available on a more frequent basis and progress toward completion of these goals would be reviewed as necessary. Reviewing new data collected is necessary if the team wishes to determine whether objectives are being met and improvement activities are being implemented as intended. The progress measure(s) selected should allow the team to see the impact program changes made on the objective(s). As part of this process, the team will need to decide how to address such questions, as (1) how will progress be evaluated?, (2) what if progress is not made as expected—what happens next?, and (3) how will our team demonstrate accountability?

Components of Evaluation

In evaluating progress of an improvement objective, the district team may decide that (1) better than expected progress is being made, (2) satisfactory progress is being made, or (3) less than satisfactory progress is being made. In the case of the first—better than expected progress—the stakeholder group may want to consider whether the progress being made in this improvement objective is indicative of setting an objective that was simply too easy to reach—perhaps it needs to be more challenging. With regard to the second finding – satisfactory progress is being made – the group is likely to conclude ongoing monitoring will be sufficient to track progress.

In the event that less than satisfactory progress is being made, the group should discuss possible reasons why progress is below expectations. Stakeholder group members might consider reassessing the types of resources being dedicated to implement the objective or they may want to review action steps and improvement activities incorporated in the improvement plan. In some cases, the district might decide to take another look at the objective itself and additional analyses and drilldown might be necessary to modify or adjust aspects of the improvement plan that serve as barriers to progress.

Data Use for Monitoring Objectives

In most cases, the data sources needed to monitor procedures can be determined by the types of questions being asked. For example, if the primary question of the objective focuses on impact of the target audience (i.e., students with a potential to drop-out) the district would review the yearly drop-out rate data.

Once the data sources have been identified, the type of analysis that should be conducted needs to be specified. It is important to remember to refer back to the original questions being asked when conducting the data analysis. The stakeholder group should set specific timelines for reporting progress in meeting outcomes. The team needs to identify when reports will be generated as well as with whom the reports will be shared (e.g., Superintendent, Board, or District patrons).